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SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AND AF/RSA

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TAGS: PREL PGOV GV AU

SUBJECT: USAU: AFRICAN UNION WARNS GUINEA COUP LEADERS OF STERN MEASURES

REF: ADDIS ABABA 3450

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN A. SIMON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (U) In the wake of Guinean President Lansane Conte's death and the military takeover of the country, the African Union's (AU) Peace and Security Council met December 24 in an emergency session where it warned of "stern measures" if the coup materializes. Those measures could include suspending the Government of Guinea's membership in the organization.

¶2. (U) The Guinean Permanent Representative to the AU told the PSC that he has been following events at a distance and does not consider the coup a "done deal." He noted that there is another faction in the military and his hope is that Guinea will emerge with a proper government.

¶3. (U) PSC Commissioner Ramtane Lamamra told reporters after the special session, "We strongly back constitutional institutions set up by the people and the government of Guinea." He added, "We are happy that there is no bloodletting. We want a smooth transition according to the constitution." He also called the developments in Guinea a "setback for Africa on the path to democracy." As of the moment, the PSC viewed what had happened in Guinea as "only an attempted coup." Stronger action by the PSC at this time would only serve to legitimize the group of military officers who have been making pronouncements on the media of their success.

¶4. (U) The meeting came a day after AU Commission Chairperson Jean Ping issued a statement strongly condemning the coup and the coup leaders' decision to suspend the constitution and political institutions in Guinea. "This seizure of power constitutes a flagrant violation of the Guinean Constitution, which, in such an instance, provides that the Speaker of the National Assembly assumes (the presidency in) the interim," Ping said. "It constitutes also a violation of the Lome Declaration of July 2000, the Constitutive Act of the AU and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance." Ping urged all Guinean stakeholders "to work within the framework of legality, in a spirit of consensus and in the higher interests of Guinea, in order to ensure a smooth transition that will allow their country to meet the many challenges, both political and socio-economic, facing it."

¶5. (U) Ping has initiated consultations with ECOWAS and countries in the region to discuss how they will coordinate their efforts in resolving the crisis "in a legal and consensual manner," according to the AU press statement, which also emphasized that resolution of the crisis is "a precondition for the long-term stability and consolidation of the democratic process in that country."

¶6. (U) Comment: The AU's swift response was reminiscent of its response last August when it learned that military officers had ousted Mauritania's democratically elected President Abdallah. With the Mauritanian junta still in power more than four months later, the PSC Ministers warned on December 22 that if the junta does not restore constitutional order by February 5, the AU will impose sanctions on all the junta members and their supporters, military and civilian (see reftel).

¶7. (C) Comment continued: As AU officials have discovered in the aftermath of the coup in Mauritania, it is not enough to express zero tolerance for military takeovers. There have to be threats of concrete measures, such as targeted sanctions, against the perpetrators of coups, and more importantly, implementation of those measures. One AU official charged with the organization's institutional transformation told us he is worried that unless the AU succeeds in pressuring the military juntas to return to their barracks, it will embolden other coup plotters to take over governments by force.

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